

Dear Montgomery County Executive and Council Members,

As you consider the capital and operating budgets, I urge you to support the Parks Department budget in full and, most particularly, the Native Plant Program at Pope Farm Nursery. This program supplies native plants for Montgomery Parks and has significant influence in the entire region through the efforts of its volunteers, of which I am one. My late husband, Jim Farrelly, was another. We are Rockville residents and are extremely proud of the Pope Farm program and our participation in it. It is but one aspect of the Montgomery County Parks program that needs your support.

Through the County's past support and continuing volunteer commitment to spreading the word about the importance of native plants to the environment, volunteers have shared native plants from their yards and been able to obtain plants from the Pope Farm Nursery to plant in parks and native gardens throughout the county. For example, the Farrelly yard was full of native plants that came from the Pope Farm nursery, either derived from seed chaff left after seeds were cleaned or gifts to volunteers. The Farrelly yard served as a staging area for Rockville City Parks, gardens at places of worship, private gardens throughout Rockville, and gardens at elementary and high schools planted by students, and the wider county. Pope Farm plants were used also in forest restoration efforts by Weed Warriors in Rockville City Parks and a Monarch Waystation created, designed, and implemented by a girl scout troop at RedGate Park in Rockville.

The past few years during the Covid pandemic have demonstrated the importance of parks to the mental, physical and emotional well-being of our Montgomery County residents. Native flora that support native fauna are contributing factors in enhancing the experience Montgomery County residents have in their parks. Parks provide a safe, healthy, and nurturing escape during difficult times, so it is more important than ever that the Parks Department has adequate staff and resources. The budget cuts you propose do not cover employee compensation or inflationary cost increases, will require drastic reductions in service, and forfeiture of the program enhancements included in the budget.

Parks provide a haven in which adults and children may observe and enjoy the wildlife that native plants attract and learn about the interrelationships among different components of a healthy ecosystem. As such, our parks are not only a source of refuge during difficult times, but also a classroom. The funding you provide will be critical for our parks, which are, in turn, supported by the Native Plant Program.

Parks are essential to a high quality of life in Montgomery County and native plants are critical for creating sustainable ecosystems and habitat for wildlife, including insects, without which life on this planet would not exist. For this reason, I encourage your approval of the complete amount requested by the Parks Department. I am proud to be a part of a program within that department that contributes to the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of Montgomery County residents.

Please continue your support of the Parks Department and keep our Native Plant Program alive and growing!

Sincerely,

Anne Goodman, PhD
USDA, APHIS, retired.